Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-11 (Cancelled)

12. (Currently Amended) An expression cassette comprising:

a) a bacterial promoter, hereinafter called p_{zn}, comprising a binding site for the ~~*Lactococus*~~ *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein, which site comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTT

(SEQ ID NO:1),

in which TTGACA represents the -35 box of said promoter, and N represents A, C, G or T;

b) a sequence encoding a polypeptide exhibiting at least 80% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein, placed under the transcriptional control of said promoter; and

c) at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence of interest under the transcriptional control of said promoter.

13. (Previously Presented) The expression cassette of claim 12, wherein

the p_{zn} promoter comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTTNNNNNNNNNTATAAT

(SEQ ID NO:2),

in which TATAAT represents the -10 box of said promoter.

14. (Previously Presented) The expression cassette of claim 13, wherein the p_{zn} promoter comprises a sequence selected from the group consisting of:

- the sequence:

AAAAATAATGTTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTTACTTTGCTATATAATTAACCAGTA

(SEQ ID NO:4); and

- the sequence:

AAAAATAACGTTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTTCTTTGCTATATAATTAACCAGTA

(SEQ ID NO:5).

15. (Previously Presented) An expression cassette comprising:

a) a bacterial promoter p_{zn} as defined in claim 12; and

b) at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of said promoter.

16. (Previously Presented) An expression cassette resulting from the insertion of a nucleotide sequence encoding an extracellular targeting peptide, and of at least one restriction site allowing cloning of a nucleotide sequence as a translational

fusion with said targeting peptide, under the transcriptional control of the p_{zn} promoter, into an expression cassette as claimed in claim 12.

17. (Previously Presented) The expression cassette of Claim 16, wherein said extracellular targeting peptide is a signal peptide of sequence:

MKKINLALLTLATLMGVSSTAVVFA (SEQ ID NO:6).

18. (Previously Presented) An expression cassette resulting from the insertion of a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of the p_{zn} promoter, into an expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12, with the exclusion of the expression cassettes comprising all or part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein, fused to a reporter gene.

19. (Previously Presented) A recombinant vector comprising an expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12.

20. (Previously Presented) A gram-positive bacterium transformed with at least one expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12.

21. (Currently Amended) The bacterium of Claim ~~19~~ 20 , which is a lactic acid bacterium.

22. (Previously Presented) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises culturing a gram-positive bacterium transformed with at least one expression cassette of Claim 12.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 22, wherein the gram-positive bacterium is a lactic acid bacteria.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 22, wherein the lactic acid bacteria is selected from the group consisting of lactococci, lactobacilli and streptococci.

25. (Previously Presented) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises the steps of:

a) introducing in said bacterium at least one expression cassette of Claim 12, comprising a sequence encoding said protein;

b) culturing said bacterium in a medium comprising an amount of Zn^{+2} that is sufficient to repress the expression of the protein;

c) inducing the production of said protein by Zn^{+2} depletion of said medium; and

d) recovering the protein produced.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 25, wherein the Zn^{+2}

depletion of the medium is effected by adding a divalent cation-chelating compound to the medium.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 25, wherein the Zn^{+2} depletion of the medium is effected by culturing the bacterium until depletion of the Zn^{+2} occurs in the medium.

28. (Previously Presented) A method of controlling expression of a promoter of the ZitRSQP operon in a bacterium, which comprises varying concentration of Zn^{+2} in a medium containing the bacterium.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 28, wherein increasing the Zn^{+2} concentration represses expression of the promoter.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 28, wherein decreasing the Zn^{+2} concentration promotes expression of the promoter.

31. (New) The expression cassette of Claim 12, wherein sequence b) encodes polypeptide exhibiting at least 85% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

32. (New) The expression cassette of claim 31, wherein sequence b) encodes a polypeptide exhibiting at least 95% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

33. (New) The expression vector of claim 19, wherein sequence b) of said expression cassette encodes a polypeptide exhibiting at least 85% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

34. (New) The expression vector of claim 33, wherein sequence b) of said expression cassette encodes a polypeptide exhibiting at least 95% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.